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040950Z Apr 05

ACTION AF-00

INFO	LOG-00	AID-00	ACQ-00	DODE-00	EB-00	EUR-00	UTED-00
	VC-00	TEDE-00	INR-00	IO-00	L-00	VCE-00	AC-00
	NSAE-00	NSCE-00	OIC-00	OMB-00	PA-00	PM-00	PRS-00
	ACE-00	P-00	SP-00	SS-00	STR-00	TRSE-00	T-00
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FM AMEMBASSY ACCRA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8238
INFO ECOWAS COLLECTIVE
CDR USEUCOM VAHINGEN GE
CIA WASHDC
AMEMBASSY LONDON

UNCLAS ACCRA 000661

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [GH](#)

SUBJECT: OUTREACH TO THE MUSLIMS OF GHANA'S NORTHERN REGION

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary: Emboffs were generally well received on an intense Muslim outreach trip to Tamale, capital of Northern Region, on March 23-25. Interlocutors raised questions about U.S. foreign policy, USG activities in Ghana, and about how they could benefit from scholarships, USG assistance, and U.S. exchanges. They explained why most Ghanaian Muslims are dissatisfied with the ruling NPP party. Emboffs were told they were not welcome and should leave when they went to address the Tamale Polytechnic, a reminder that there are some radical elements in the Ghanaian Muslim community which will require further Embassy outreach efforts. End summary.

Meeting with Muslim Groups

[1](#)2. (U) On March 23-25, PolChief, PAO and Econoff traveled to Tamale, capital of Ghana's Northern Region, as part of the Embassy's outreach effort to Ghana's 15-20 percent Muslim population.

[1](#)3. (U) Emboffs met with about 150 members of the Ghana Muslim Students' Association, University of Development Studies. They called on the Chief Imam of the Central Mosque and about 30 of his followers, and hosted a two hour roundtable with around 40 Muslim NGO activists, Islamic teachers, journalists, and Imams, including the Deputy Chief Imam of the conservative Alhussunna community in Northern Region. Emboffs also met independently with several Muslim NGO activists and women leaders.

[1](#)4. (U) In all these meetings, Emboffs described the Muslim community in America and US Embassy activities in Northern Region, as well as fielding a range of questions on USG policy toward Iraq and the Middle East, US attitudes toward Muslims and terrorism, nuclear nonproliferation policy, the role of girls' education, and visa issues. For the most part, interlocutors were receptive to our arguments and claimed they now understood that America was not anti-Muslim and was not denying visas to Muslims, as they earlier believed. They wanted more access to USG assistance, highlighting the significant poverty and illiteracy in the Northern Region, and hoped to establish exchanges with U.S. mosques and Muslim organizations.

[1](#)5. (U) The one exception to an otherwise warm reception was the hostility Emboffs encountered when we went to speak to the Ghana Muslims Student Association at Tamale Polytechnic. After beginning our meeting in a campus mosque, we were asked to leave the mosque. There was considerable internal debate, with some students arguing that we should never have been allowed to enter the mosque and others embarrassed at not receiving us hospitably. Ultimately, the radicals in the group prevailed and we were told the students did not want to meet with us.

Muslims and Politics

[1](#)6. (SBU) On the margins of our meetings, PolChief asked about Muslim views of Ghanaian politics. Our contacts concurred that Muslim-Christian relations are generally good across Ghana. There are more divisions within the two religions than between them. The North-South divide is more pronounced and worrisome for the long term than Muslim-

Christian relations.

17. (SBU) Muslims are overwhelmingly supporters of the opposition National Democratic Congress (NDC) party. This is in part because former Prime Minister Busia, whose party was the forerunner to the ruling New Patriotic Party (NPP), adopted the Aliens Compliance Order expelling large numbers of other West Africans, many of them Muslims, living in Ghana between 1969 and 1971. Some Ghanaian Muslims were expelled because they were mistaken as foreigners. Muslims in Ghana have never forgiven the NPP for this period. In addition, former President J.J. Rawlings paid attention to Muslims, often visiting poor Muslim ghettos ("zongos"). By contrast, according to our Muslim contacts, President Kufuor of the NPP is not perceived as paying much attention to Muslims. Perceived involvement of the NPP in the 2001 murder of the Ya-Na (Chief of the Abudu "gate" of the Dagomba tribe and a Muslim) has reinforced a perception of NPP insensitivity. Muslims are reportedly unimpressed by the NPP's choice of a Muslim Vice President, which many of them view as tokenism. Muslim contacts point out that there were no Muslims in Kufuor's first Cabinet and only one in the current lineup of ministers.

Comment

18. (SBU) Muslims are among the poorest Ghanaians, especially in the three northern regions. It was not surprising that most of our questions centered on how we might assist their communities, with aid, scholarships, visas, and exchanges. Most are moderate and appeared eager to engage us in dialogue. However, there is a more radical element, which we ran into at the Tamale Polytechnic. As one interlocutor later pointed out, approaching these elements requires more one-to-one interaction and preparatory work than we had done. Their radicalism reflects, at least in part, an aggressive Iranian, Libyan and Saudi influence in the northern regions. There is clearly more work to be done to reach out to this community.

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